

The EU: Identity, Confidence and Foreign Policy in a Multi-Polar World

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I have many reasons for being happy to be in Pittsburgh today. As a very young Member of the European Parliament, I wrote a report for the External Trade Committee on EU-US Steel Issues. In the process I met Jack Heinz who became a great friend. He made me promise to visit Pittsburgh at the first opportunity ... and that was in 1982. I have a more current reason for rejoicing in finally being in Pittsburgh. One of my more pleasant duties as President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament was to oversee the EU Center Program Budget. I continue to be delighted by the quality of American studies on the European Union. Finally I am grateful to Alberta Sbragia for the wonderfully simple observation, that had previously escaped me, that Americans misread Europe because in their eyes it lacks the essential requirements of a state in their own historical experience – military force and a monopoly of foreign policy.

I want to argue today that the focus of Europe's identity is increasingly external and that foreign policy is not an add-on extra of dubious importance. In understanding the current debate about European foreign policy we can come to understand much of importance about the Union itself and about its relations with the USA.

Identity

We need to start with the mysterious case of the wrong birthday. You will all be aware that this week marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. In terms of everything that matters politically, Europe was born in 1951 with the European Coal and Steel Community. By the time of the Treaty of Rome, Europe had already experienced the loss of the European Defence Community in 1954. The Treaty of Rome is a bundle of mechanisms, but it does not embody the political spirit of the enterprise. To mistake a Treaty for an Identity should be a cardinal sin for both academics and politicians. Europe's identity flows from Beethoven and twelve gold stars, via the family portrait at summits, to a feeling of solidarity in a tough world. Identity is all about a shared history of trauma in defeat, occupation, loss of empire and civil war. A shared history of fear of the Soviet Union and of competition with the USA. This is what Europeans really mean when they talk about a Europe of Values.

The founding story of these values is of a divided Europe. Divided anciently by Franco-German rivalry, the story of Lotharingia, and divided more recently by the Red Army, the story of Europe's eastern boundary. In 2007 we have a Europe 'whole and free' except for the Western Balkans. Now however we need a new story. A story for the children of the children of Europe's civil wars. That story is about Europe in the world. There are half a billion Europeans in today's European Union, prosperous and energetic even if they will be only 6% of the world's population in 2025. This Europe has trading, political and historic links with the rest of the world. Increasingly it sees its foreign policy as a natural extension of the methods of European federalism – a mixture of treaties and targets. Europeans are busily constructing a foreign policy around energy security, climate change, the response to Islam and global governance, melding the traditions of European and world federalism.

Confidence

There is a curious feedback relationship between identity and confidence in the European Union today as it contemplates expressing itself globally in a foreign policy. The Union remains mired in the aftermath of the Constitutional Treaty. It needs a powerful new story to re-energise itself, but it needs a version of the new Treaty, however cherry picked, in order to push ahead with the self-same foreign policy. Even more importantly it needs further reform of the Council of Ministers to enable external decisions to be taken rapidly.

Of course the Constitutional Treaty should have had a more accurate and less contentious name. Of course the French and the Dutch were voting about Turkey and Islam and the silence of their political classes. One can find a hundred micro-reasons for the French and Dutch decisions but they don't

explain the likely rejections by Britons, Swedes, Czechs and Poles that never got to the voting stage. The truth is that all Member State governments have promoted scapegoatism – “if its good we did it; if its bad, Brussels did it” – in to a kind of Straussian ‘noble lie’. But the practice has backfired with particular viciousness. The electorate at large reacts with a sullen indifference to large doses of European enthusiasm from governments every time they want endorsement of their latest deal. More worryingly the Union is in danger of losing the support of the political classes in the member states. They do know what is going on. They can see through the Straussian lie. However, unless they are directly connected to Brussels, they can no longer see how they are supposed to fit into the grand design. It is not surprising therefore that today’s Europe, half way through its spasm of leadership renewal, lacks confidence in itself.

That is not to say that Europe is in crisis. The doomsayers have been disappointed that Europe did not immediately unravel after the No votes. The Union is in reality a huge and complex structure that works. It is not the unsteady bicycle of federalist myth that must keep pushing forward if it is to be stable. The eurozone has done better than expected. Manufacturing has not collapsed. The redefined Lisbon Agenda is more realistic. Parliament has coped well with enlargement, even if it is left as far too large a body. The Commission is in better shape than it has been for ten years. It has even found the energy to evolve strategies for re-capturing influence lost to Council and Parliament.

The real problem lies with the Council. Sheer numbers are forcing changes in the way in which the Council operates. The six month Presidencies have become more important. Worst of all the Summit which used to work as an exclusive decision making club at 15 simply doesn’t work at 27. For a federalist there is a certain joy to be had in this situation. For years Mrs Thatcher and her supporters argued for maximum enlargement on the grounds that it would dilute the Union. We now see these same numbers producing an unstoppable demand for more of the “Community Method” and a strengthening of the supra-national elements in Union decision making. There was a particular joy in watching the British Presidency use the “passarelle to K9” in order to move a Justice and Home Affairs issue into the Community pillar in order to avoid vetoes.

Foreign ministries were the original integrating force of the Union, but they always been reluctant to integrate themselves. Now, at last, a mixture of internal and external factors is forcing their hand as Europe struggles to work out how to prosper in a multi-polar world.

What kind of multi-polar world?

We have known for years that the world was multi-polar, but clarity has had to await the passing of the “American moment”. The burning question is what kind of multi-polar world will it be? A dangerous free for all or a rule-bound universe on the European model?

Empires rule by consent based on myth. The British Empire died with the colossal incompetence of the loss of Singapore to the Japanese – with its guns facing the wrong way. Iraq may well be America’s Singapore in ways that Saigon was not. After Vietnam, the USA was still locked in a superpower conflict with the USSR. Saigon was a shame, but not a deadly blow to America’s global self-image. After Iraq the USA will find it more difficult to play the benign, all powerful hegemon of Neo-Conservative theory. America invited submission from the world on the grounds of its “exceptionalism”. Nothing destroys such mandates of heaven faster than prolonged incompetence. History may however decide in retrospect that this was not Singapore but Suez, a moment when aspiring superpowers were only too happy to see an old warrior trapped by its own hubris. Sir Anthony Eden learned all about the sterling balances in 1956. No doubt American presidents will learn of the impact of Chinese trade surpluses on the dollar.

Condolezza Rice has made a tentative demarche towards a more careful multi-lateralism, but she labours under the impossible burden of the previous four years of gung-ho unilateralism. The cultivation of India makes good sense in terms of re-ordering the world. The structures of global governance will have to be adapted to reflect the emerging balance of power. Imperial Germany after Bismarck is a standing warning as to what can go wrong if new powers are not admitted. It makes perfect sense for the USA to use its remaining power to structure global systems incorporating the new

players and reflecting the new importance of both the environment and religion in geo-politics. However this does not mean as Daniel Drezner argues that it is necessary to drop old European allies in favour of new players (The New New World Order, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2007). For the last three hundred years global leadership has been passed from one European culture to another. Both Europe and America need to think carefully about how to engineer the peaceful integration of Asia. If ever there was a case for trans- Atlantic co-operation, this is it.

Europe, despite its stunted foreign policy instruments, has made some progress in exploring a foreign policy suitable for a multi-polar world. The huge demonstrations in European cities at the beginning of March 2003 were described as the “birth of a nation”. Europe of both Left and Right realised that it could no longer lie gently on the bosom of a benign American hegemony. The Arab world is much more Europe’s problem than America. It has a history going back for many centuries. Both Christianity and Islam define themselves by their mutual antagonism. Twelve million Muslims now live in the European Union. Their faith unrestrained by local traditions and loyalties, they are the future of jihad. Suicide bombers with Yorkshire accents are the nature of Europe’s problem. Europe’s population knows this with a clarity that escapes the political correctness of the elites. Europe also stands geographically as the destination of choice for climate change refugees. Isolationism is not an option for the Cape of Eurasia that chooses to call itself Europe. In a recent speech in Brussels David Cameron, Leader of the British Conservative Party, called for Europe to concentrate on three Gs – Globalisation, Global Warming and Global Poverty. Such advice would serve both Europe and America well as they re-design their foreign policies in a multi-polar world.

